

The True Principle of Non-Resistance in War and Peace

By Professor Herman A. Hoyt

For 19 centuries believers have been living in the world, even though they were separated from the world and not of the world. And during these 19 centuries they have faced every conceivable test known to human flesh, and generally speaking have been gloriously victorious, for greater was He that was in them than he that was in the world (I Jn. 4:4). And not the least of the problems which they faced was the oft-recurring problem of non-resistance, which, by the way, faces every believer anew today. For so long as believers must live in a world of sin where selfish hearts are employing every conceivable method to achieve their selfish ends, for that long will believers be facing this tremendous problem.

Now the occasion for a fresh discussion of this problem, as anyone can well see, is the moral and spiritual darkness which is overwhelming the entire world, creating international strife and internal disorder, and contributing to individual degeneration. This means that the present generation of believers will be called upon afresh to determine the course of action they will pursue in the case of war and litigation. And this further means that nothing short of a clear understanding of the true principle of non-resistance as taught in the Bible will enable the believer to pursue the proper course of action.

1. It is therefore necessary at this point in our discussion that a **careful statement of the principle** be given. But it should be remarked that the principle



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of non-resistance is only **one aspect** of the larger principle of non-conformity to or separation from the world, which is clearly stated in Rom. 12:2, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." Since going to war and going to law belong definitely to this world (Jn. 18:36; 1 Cor. 6:1-5), it therefore follows that the principle of non-conformity includes the principle of non-resistance in matters of war and law.

It should also be noted that the principle of non-conformity is not **wholly negative** as one might be led to think. For though Rom. 12:2 clearly states that there should be separation from the world on the one hand, that is not all; for on the other hand it states that there should be transformation, and that by the renewing of the mind with the Word of God, that God's will might be experienced, tested and approved. And as both the negative and the positive elements of this principle apply to everything included within this principle, so both elements apply to the matter of non-resistance. Thus we conclude that the true principle of non-resistance not only forbids recourse to law and war for the redress of wrong, but also provides that believers shall become like Christ in seeking the good of all men (Rom. 13:8; Gal. 6:10.)

2. We are now ready for discussion of certain very **precise limitations** relating to this principle.

In the first place, the principle of non-resistance is strictly limited to the **sphere of believers**. Since the epistle to the Romans is addressed to believers, the larger principle of non-conformity cannot be laid upon unbelievers (Cf. Rom. 12:1). And the context of the passage of Scripture in which specific reference is made to war (Jn. 18:36) and law (1 Cor. 6:1-11; cf. 1:2) is careful to explain that only believers are in mind.

In the second place, the principle of non-resistance is strictly limited to the **sphere of individuals**. No commands like this are delivered to the church as a whole, for that would reduce the possibility. But this does not mean that the church as an organization of individuals shall not legislate and discharge certain responsibilities pertaining to this very question. But any such action on the part of a body of believers will only mean that believers are individually responsible. If a church wilfully commits an act of aggression at law or war, the individuals who are guilty will God hold responsible.

In the third place, the principle of non-resistance is strictly limited to the **sphere of Christ's kingdom**. This means that governments of this world are not only permitted but also are ordained of God to use the force of sword or law against evil doers, whether it be nations or individuals. And this is only right, for this is one method by which God has provided for rectifying wrong in this world (Jn. 18:36; Rom. 13:1-5). Then too, it must be remembered that the interests of the world are bound up with the world and the present order. Hence it is necessary that, at least in some small way, wrong be rectified here and now. However, even in the sphere of the world, unjust acts of aggression in war or at law are not permitted of God, and are punishable both here and hereafter (Rom. 13:2; Rev. 20:15).

3. Having come this far, it is now time to present a **number of reasons** for the principle of non-resistance.

In the first place, the **express purpose** for non-conformity to the world, which likewise covers non-re-

sistance, is to "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2). By this Paul means that through personal obedience to the command for separation from the world the believer will enter into personal experience and approval of the will of God as being altogether good, decidedly pleasing, and lacking in nothing which it ought to possess.

In the second place, the **divine prerogative** for vengeance forbids that believers shall usurp it (Rom. 12:19). Of course, the specific reason for going to law or to war will invariably be stated as redress for wrong. And there is a sense in which wrongs can be punished in this world, although not fully punished, for every wrong is against God and therefore assumes infinite dimensions. But for the believer, even temporal justice must be set aside, for he has a new standard. Having entered into a sublime relationship with the Lord Jesus, and having committed everything to Him, it is inconsistent with that profession to seek to avenge when God says: "Vengeance is mine; I will repay."

In the third place, the **divine methods** for obtaining justice are different from those of the world (Jn. 18:36). While the kingdoms of this world must be defended from enemies, be delivered from aggressors, and be perpetuated by methods employing physical force, this is not true of Christ's kingdom, for it is not of this world. Being a kingdom which was decreed of God, and therefore has the blessing and stamp of eternity upon it, nothing can destroy it. And especially is it unnecessary to defend it with physical force, since physical force cannot touch it.

In the fourth place, the **spiritual nature** of Christ's subjects dictates a new policy toward offenders (Lk. 9:52-56). The sons of thunder, stirred with indignation at the disgraceful reception of their Lord, would have readily called down fire to consume a certain village of Samaritans, but the Lord Jesus rebuked them with the reminder of their spiritual origin. He declared that His very spirit was being demonstrated in that He was now on the way to the cross to save men, not to destroy them. Therefore it may be concluded that the very nature of God which is imparted to the believer by the operation of the Holy Spirit dictates the policy of non-resistance.

4. Finally, let us note that **transgression of the principle** of non-resistance in the realm of law called forth six inescapable charges against the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 6:1-11).

The first charge of **insolence** was leveled at them because they dared to drag their brethren into the low courts of the land, and that before the unjust world (1). Nor was the second charge of **ignorance** any less stinging in its reproach, for they were charged with ignorance of the position the saints were to occupy some day as the judges of the world and of angels (2-4). And to level at the Corinthians, who loved to boast of wisdom and power, the third charge of **inability** to settle their own disputes must have been extremely humiliating to them. But it was true, and true because they were in a very low spiritual state (5-6). The fourth charge of **immorality** was made because there was "utterly a fault" among them in that inordinate greed drove them to rob their brethren at law (7-8). Such conduct was evidence that they were under an **illusion** as to the personnel of the kingdom, thinking that those who practice unrighteousness are now members of the kingdom and would some day inherit it (9-10). And this charge prepared the way for the final charge of **indifference** toward the great facts in their salvation: indifference toward baptism which is the great symbol of regeneration, and toward sanctification and justification (11).

It should therefore be said in closing that the principle of non-resistance is inextricably bound up with Christianity, and constitutes one aspect of the

great principle of non-conformity to the world. True Christians will obey the command to love not the world, neither the things that are in the world, knowing that if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him (1 Jn. 2:15). So professed believers who transgress the principle of non-resistance either by practice or approval will do well to examine themselves to see whether they be in the faith.

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